December 21, 1986

Dear Mom,

At last I'm able to sit down and write a proper letter. 'Tis the season to be busy. We,re having a mild Santa Ana condition today and it's just gorgeous outside--clear blue sky and 70 degrees. Yesterday was a different story. It was about ten degrees cooler, lots of dark clouds, rain, hail, thunder and lightning off and on all day.

Your gift arrived yesterday and without hesitation I disobeyed you. I opened it before I even got it home from the post office. Actually, I picked it up on my way to the supermarket and by the time I got to the market it was pouring so hard I had to sit in the car waiting for a break. So what else could I do? I opened your gift. The shirt is lovely and a perfect fit. But the jeans, though they were the size I told Gail, were the pre-shrunk type, rather than the shrink-to-fit type. So they were too large. However, there is a Gap clothing store right here in Fashion Valley and I went right over there to make the exchange. The only problem with that was that they were having a sale & I couldn't resist buying myself a sleeveless V-neck sweater (it'll be great for work--100% virgin wool), a green-red-black plaid flannel shirt with button-down collar, and a gray-red-blue traditional plaid shirt with button-down collar (also 100% cotton). Pretty good to myself, huh? Well, you know how it is--if you don't get what you like when you see it, it'll be gone when you think you can afford it. So it was Mastercard to the rescue. The thing is that each item was marked down at least $10.00 and we can all relate to that. So even if I wind up paying some interest on the unpaid balance, I'll come out ahead.

While in another store I saw something that was just perfect for you and in another fit of impulse buying I snatched it up. Now, I had already gotten you a Christmas gift and am in the process of working on some Christmas tapes for you, so it's not a Christmas gift. My dilemma is that I'm very excited about giving it to you and don't want to wait until your birthday, so I may just send it to you in January. How's that for a piece of silliness?

More about Christmas: Before I get too far off the subject, let me thank you very much for the shirt and jeans. I'm wearing the jeans right now and they are very soft and comfortable. I had not tried the pre-shrunk Levis before, but I may just be hooked on them now. The dress shirt will come in very handy for work. It's so nice to have a little more variety so that I don't appear to be wearing the same thing all the time. It'll go very nicely with some of my brown slacks. And if I hadn't had to exchange the jeans, I'd never have found those nice bargains. So everything worked out just fine.

I'm doing my best to complete work on some tapes for your Christmas present but as time keeps racing along, it becomes clear that I won't be able to get it all done in time. I'm very sorry about that, but you may just have to settle for your gift in installments. I've been working my buns off, but there are just so many hours in the day as you well know. How come we all became work-aholics? Did you ever think about that?

Last weekend I had Bryan & Christine over for dinner. Do you remember them? I had an Armour boneless turkey like I had when you were here. The meal turned out great and we had a great visit. It had been so long since we had all had the same weekend off and could get together for some socializing. They sure have been great friends to me.

Gary Rees is coming over for dinner tomorrow night so that he can listen to the tapes I made of Morris Kight's presentation at a Los Angeles event called "Speaking the Vision" last month. It's also been a long time since Gary and I have had a chance to just sit and chat about what's going on in our lives. I plan to have baked salmon steaks, steamed brown rice, creamed peas, buttered carrots, hot bread, followed by snickerdoodles and tea for dessert. I've got to make the snickerdoodles and a cake this evening because there won't be time after work tomorrow. The cake is for a pot-luck lunch with my new gang of co-workers at Scripps on Tuesday.

And speaking of dinners and pot lucks, I'm having Pat, Matt, and Dion over for Christmas dinner. Here's the menu: hors d'oeuvre--avocado stuffed with crab salad, strawberry smoothie appetizer fresh from my blender. Main course: Baked ham, buttered yams, broccoli & califlower in cheese sause, corn pudding, specialty bread, sparkling cider. Dessert: Pistacio pudding cake (green) with red cream cheese icing to add a little festive color. Preparing a big dinner always makes me a little bit nervous, as I always am worried that everything won't be done at the same time. How I admire your skill in this area. Anyhow, I'll be among friends and no one is going to ridicule me if I'm not a perfect cook.

So, "Who is Dion?", you ask. Dion is a long-time friend of Jerry Schmeits, who died of AIDS on Thanksgiving eve. Dion devoted the past year of his life to taking care of Jerry. He moved in with him, was his constant companion and caretaker. I'm sure that your experiences with your mother will help you understand what kind of a sacrifice that entails. It seems that every tragic AIDS death is paralleled by an heroic effort on part of someone. Dion was definitely the hero in this case. I didn't know Dion before Jerry's illness, but became very impressed with his devotion to Jerry as Jerry drew closer to his transition.

Knowing that the holidays can be a very difficult time in the wake of the recent loss of a loved one, and suspecting that Dion did not have any family locally, I invited him to join Pat and Matt and me for Christmas dinner. I really didn't think that he would take me up on it, but was so delighted that he did. Though Pat and Matt had never met either Jerry or Dion, I had kept them informed of Jerry's decline and Dion's devotion to him. I had also told them about Jerry's years of community service work and what a tremendous loss his passing was to San Diego, not just the gay community. Pat and Matt are looking forward to Meeting Dion and I am very pleased that in addition to having a nice dinner we will be providing some warmth and fellowship to someone who might otherwise be alone at a very difficult time. (Please see the enclosed articles from Update. D. J. Reeder, who authored the poem to Jerry, is Dion.)

Thanks for the news about meeting Culver and Bill Young. She sent me a note on her Christmas card about the same meeting. She thought that you looked great. She's right--I didn't even send her a Christmas card last year. I only managed to send cards to family and a few very close personal friends last year. This year I was a little more disciplined and sent 49 cards, every one with a note or letter. It took me four days worth of spare time and that's the main reason that your Christmas gift will be late. It seems that while I'm doing one thing I'm neglecting another. Anyhow, it's done and I hope it made up for last year's laxness.

Also, as part of being more disciplined this year, I've already got my ranunculus tubers in the ground. And, I have 6 dozen tulip bulbs in the refrigerator that will be ready for planting in early January. So we should have some color around here for the spring. This summer was the first summer in many years that I did not have a flower garden. But I was so busy with Ray, who was in the final months of his life, that it just was not possible. Life is like that, I guess. You can't do everything you'd like to do, so you just have to choose what's most important. Happiness can depend on how well you make your choices.

I got a recent letter and Christmas greeting from Leigh. He specifically sent his love and best wishes to you for a nice holiday and prosperous 1987.

Mom, do you ever watch the TV show "Simon & Simon"? It is filmed in San Diego, & there are almost always some very visible and recognizable San Diego landmarks on the program--Balboa Park, the Tijuana Trolly, Coronado Bay Bridge, Hotel Del Coronado, etc. Just thought you might get a kick out of seeing some of those places again.

And, speaking of the film industry, we had a rather unusual event here on Laurel Street this past week. A production company from Colorado was here all week shooting a movie at 2960 Laurel, just two doors from Daisy's place. They took up the whole street for 4 days (we all had to park somewhere else) and were all over the place with cameras, lighting and sound equipment, trucks full of costumes and make-up and 1920's cars. Sounds exciting, but after the first 15 minutes it was more of a pain in the ass than anything. They finished up and disappeared late Friday.

Wish you could be here to see the splendor of the Christmas lights in Balboa Park and downtown San Diego this year. Not since the oil embargo of more than ten years ago have things been so decorated. The rains of yesterday cleared the air of polution and the Santa Ana is keeping our usual late night clouds out at sea so it is a great time to view the city at night. Oh, how I love my San Diego!

Looking back over 1986, I must tell you that it seems to be ending on a much better note than it began for me. As you may remember, I was hospitalized last December 31st with a low back strain, and had bronchitis on top of that. Then there was the theft of most of my clothes, the loss of one of my paychecks by the bank, the

auto accident, the seemingly endless problems on the job, and what seemed to me to be the desertion of some people whom I thought I could depend on for support. In addition to the passing of Ray and Casey, I lost two personal friends of more than 10 years each (Jerry Schmeits and Steve Zimmerman) to AIDS. Then there was the energy-time-and-money draining struggle against proposition 64. The victory over prop 64 was sweet, but it was demoralizing to have to deal with such a thing in the first place. I think I shall always remember 1986 as one of the toughest years of my life, and I am not sorry to see it draw to a close. At the same time, there always seems to be a silver lining. Where there was pain there was growth. I am in many ways wiser and stronger as a result of the adversity, and therefore, better able to face whatever struggles lie ahead.

Those "friends" that failed me left me more time for the stronger relationships that stood the test of strain. The financial problems led me to make some changes that will in the long run provide more security. The job change, as stressful as it was, was long overdue, and may have provided a direction that is better suited for me. I do believe that life provides just what we need in order to learn the lessons that we haven't yet learned. So if we can look at life's little adversities as the kicks in the ass that we needed to make us do what we needed to do, then we can actually benefit from what sometimes seems like tragedy.

I am aware that life is not doled out in discrete little 12-month packets, each one ending with the calender year, and each one distinctly different from the next. However, hope springs eternal, and my New Year's wish is for a calmer, smoother year ahead—one that will give me a chance to reflect on the past and chart my own course for a while, rather than being tossed by the storms. I hope that 1987 will see some significant breakthroughs in the treatment and prevention of AIDS and that by this time next year we will be making plans for the dismantling of the San Diego AIDS Project because it will be no longer needed.

Of course, it is also a time to count ones blessings rather than simply bemoan the past. With that in mind, I must say that I am thankful to be alive and well. I feel privileged that my friends who have passed on this year allowed me to be a part of their lives and their transitions. I am thankful for the friends who stood by me this year, that I have a job, and for the relative security that those things bring.

I am also greatful for having one of the greatest moms the world has ever known. You have always been my greatest friend, even when I didn't realize it. You have stood by me when times were toughest, and given unconditional support even when you may not have understood me. But beyond that, even though you had only 4 (a large number by today's standards) children of your own, you have mothered scores of children over the last fifty years, sometimes at great personal sacrifice. And I think that each one of those children, many of them now adults, are better people for their contact with you. You've taught us all values that benefit for a lifetime, and in that way you have made the world a better place.

You have, on occasion, complimented me for my community service work. Do you think that you had nothing to do with that? From day one you have taught me to be concerned for others, especially the underdog, the underprivileged. You didn't teach me by lecturing me on the subject. You taught me by doing that kind of work, by being concerned enough for others to do something about it. The influence of your work will outlive you. And I think that that is a pretty fine legacy. I hope as much can be said for me when I am your age.

And speaking of good things, I call your attention to the enclosed news clipping, "Men's Chorus at Cathedral". You'll notice that the event was held at St Paul's Episcopal Cathedral (where you and me and the queen all went to church one time). I attended the event (and bye-the-way, it's the "San Diego Gay Men's Chorus") and it was spectacular. They were flawless. I was so proud of them.

And finally, I have enclosed a news story about Bob Eggold, a former Emergency Room physician at Scripps, whom you met—a big blond handsome fellow (looks like Joe Palooka)—there's a picture of him in your album. He was always very kind to me and I'm sorry that he's in such trouble.

I'm sending your January check a little early just because it might come in handy at this time of year. I wish you a restful and joyful holiday. Know that my thoughts and prayers will be with you.

Your loving son,

Bob